## IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A community service offering apparatus for exchanging information with a plurality of user terminals connected by a network, the apparatus comprising:

virtual space information storing means for storing, in advance, virtual space information specifying a plurality of types of virtual spaces to be offered for ~~selection~~ purchase;

virtual space offering means for allowing a first user to select one of said virtual spaces as a user-specific virtual space leased or owned by said first user; and

charge controlling means for charging said first user a fee based on the specified type of said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 2 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said charge controlling means does not charge fees on users other than said first user who gain access to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said virtual space information specifies a maximum number of further users who can gain access simultaneously to said user-specific virtual space, and

said charge controlling means charges said first user a fee based on the specified maximum number of further users who can gain access simultaneously to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said charge controlling means charges said first user a fee in proportion to the amount of data constituting a real storage area allocated to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 5 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said virtual space information specifies a maximum number of objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space, and

said charge controlling means charges said first user a fee based on the specified maximum number of objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 6 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

access managing means for managing access to said user-specific virtual space,

wherein, if users other than said first user attempt to gain access to said user-specific virtual space, then said access managing means determines whether to permit said access based on a virtual space identification code for identifying said user-specific virtual space and on a password, both said virtual space identification code and said password being input by the access-attempting users.

Claim 7 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

object managing means for managing objects located where desired in said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 8 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said object managing means manages objects located as designated by those users other than said first user who gain access to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 9 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method for exchanging information with a plurality of user terminals connected by a network, the method comprising the steps of:

allowing a user to select any one of a plurality of virtual spaces provided in advance;

offering the selected virtual space as a user-specific virtual space owned by said user regarded as a privileged user; and

charging said privileged user who owns said user-specific virtual space a fee corresponding to a type of said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 10 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 9, wherein fees are not charged on those users other than said privileged user who simply gain access to said user-specific virtual space of said privileged user in said charging step.

Claim 11 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 9, wherein said privileged user is charged a fee in proportion to the number of other users who may gain access simultaneously to said user-specific virtual space in said charging step.

Claim 12 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 9, wherein said privileged user is charged a fee in proportion to the amount of data constituting a real storage area allocated to said user-specific virtual space in said charging step.

Claim 13 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 9, wherein said privileged user is charged either a fee in proportion to the number of objects that may be allocated to said user-specific virtual space or a fee in accordance with types of said objects, in addition to said fee corresponding to said type of said user-specific virtual space, in said charging step.

Claim 14 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 9, further comprising the step of managing access to said user-specific virtual space, wherein, if users other than said privileged user attempt to gain access to said user-specific virtual space, then, in said access managing step, it is determined whether or not to permit said access based on a virtual space identification code for identifying said user-specific virtual space and on a password, both said virtual space identification code and said password being input by the access-attempting users.

Claim 15 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 9, further comprising the step of managing objects located where desired in said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 16 (Withdrawn): A community service offering method according to claim 15, wherein objects located as designated by those users other than said privileged user who gain access to said user-specific virtual space are managed in said object managing step.

Claim 17 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium which stores a program for causing a community service offering apparatus exchanging information with a plurality of user terminals connected by a network, to execute the steps of:

allowing a user to select any one of a plurality of virtual spaces provided in advance;

offering the selected virtual space as a user-specific virtual space owned by said user regarded as a privileged user; and

charging said privileged user who owns said user-specific virtual space a fee corresponding to a type of said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 18 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 17, wherein fees are not charged on those users other than said privileged user who simply gain access to said user-specific virtual space of said privileged user in said charging step.

Claim 19 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 17, wherein said privileged user is charged a fee in proportion to the number of other users who may gain access simultaneously to said user-specific virtual space in said charging step.

Claim 20 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 17, wherein said privileged user is charged a fee in proportion to the amount of data constituting a real storage area allocated to said user-specific virtual space in said charging step.

Claim 21 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 17, wherein said privileged user is charged either a fee in proportion to the number of objects that may be allocated to said user-specific virtual space or a fee in accordance with types of said objects,

in addition to said fee corresponding to said type of said user-specific virtual space, in said

charging step.


Claim 22 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 17, wherein

said program further comprises the step of managing access to said user-specific virtual

space, wherein, if users other than said privileged user attempt to gain access to said user-

specific virtual space, then, in said access managing step, it is determined whether or not to

permit said access based on a virtual space identification code for identifying said user-

specific virtual space and on a password, both said virtual space identification code and said

password being input by the access-attempting users.


Claim 23 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 17, wherein

said program further comprises the step of managing objects located where desired in said

user-specific virtual space.


Claim 24 (Withdrawn): A program storage medium according to claim 23, wherein

objects located as designated by those users other than said privileged user who gain access

to said user-specific virtual space are managed in said object managing step.


Claim 25 (Currently Amended): A community system for allowing a community

service offering apparatus to exchange information with a plurality of user terminals

connected by a network,

wherein:

said community service offering apparatus comprises

virtual space information storing means for storing, in advance, information specifying a plurality of types of virtual spaces to be offered for ~~selection~~ purchase,

virtual space offering means for allowing a first user to select one of said virtual spaces as a user-specific virtual space leased or owned by said first user, and

charge controlling means for charging said first user a fee based on the specified type of said user-specific virtual space;

fees are not charged on users other than said first user who simply gain access to said user-specific virtual space; and

each of said user terminals comprises displaying means for displaying said user-specific virtual space.


Claim 26 (Previously Presented): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

said virtual space information specifies limited types of objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space, and

said charge controlling means charges said privileged user a fee in accordance with the specified limited types of said objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space.


Claim 27 (Withdrawn): A community service offering apparatus configured to exchange information with a plurality of user terminals connected by a network, the apparatus comprising:

memory configured to store, in advance, virtual space information specifying a plurality of types of virtual spaces to be offered for selection;

a processor configured to allow a first user to select one of said virtual spaces as a user-specific virtual space leased or owned by said first user and configured to charge said first user a fee based on the specified type of said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 28 (Withdrawn): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said virtual space information further specifies a maximum number of other users who can gain access simultaneously to said user-specific virtual space, and

said fee is further based on the specified maximum number of other users who can gain access simultaneously to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 29 (Withdrawn): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said virtual space information further specifies a maximum number of objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space, and

said fee is further based on the specified maximum number of objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 30 (Withdrawn): A community service offering apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said virtual space information further specifies limited types of objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space, and

said fee is further based on the specified limited types of said objects that can be allocated to said user-specific virtual space.

Claim 31 (Currently Amended): A computer readable carrier including program instructions that cause a computer to implement a method of exchanging information with a plurality of user terminals connected by a network, the method comprising:

storing, in advance, virtual space information specifying a plurality of types of virtual spaces to be offered for ~~selection~~ <u>purchase</u>;

allowing a first user to select one of said virtual spaces as a user-specific virtual space leased or owned by said first user; and

charging said first user a fee based on the specified type of said user-specific virtual space.